

Welcome to Our Latest Edition

Our goal is to provide a medium for VA MS professionals to share expertise and improve care for MS patients. We welcome your thoughts, comments, and participation.

Please pass this issue along. If you know someone who wishes to be included on the electronic distribution list, forward the email address to the editor.

A Letter from the VA-SIG Chair

Hello Everyone,

I hope that this letter finds you in good health and well-being. As you all know, at this year's Consortium of MS Centers–VA-SIG meeting we will be electing new officers. This is a very exciting time for the VA-SIG as we redefine our goals and go forward in exciting new directions led by a new slate of officers.

We will be actively trying to create a true “membership” in the VA-SIG and we will be sending out a form to help us in this task. Please watch for it and return promptly. I also ask everyone to take a few moments to update his or her information in the Outlook email system. As chair, I really rely on the contact information in Outlook and, unfortunately, often find valuable information missing, especially phone, fax, and pager numbers. If we want to foster effective communication within the VHA, we need as much contact information as possible, so please update your profile.

By the time you read this letter, the CMSC meeting will be upon us. Unfortunately this year, some of those attending will not be staying at the main hotel, Westin Kierland Resort, but there will be shuttle service between the Kierland Resort and alternate hotels. In the VA-SIG hospitality room, I will post a list for people to sign to indicate where they are staying. Please look out for other VA attendees so no one gets left behind at the end of the day.

VA-SIG members must attend the following VA sessions: June 1–membership/elections meeting, 5 p.m.–6 p.m.; June 3–VA Symposium, 9 a.m. to noon & 1 p.m.–2:30 p.m.; June 3–VA-SIG Roundtable 3 p.m.–4 p.m. Attendance will be taken and failure to sign in will jeopardize authorized funding for this conference and could impact future approvals.

I certainly look forward to seeing old friends and making new ones. Remember, this is a great opportunity to network both within the VA system as well as with other non-VA providers, so don't forget your business cards.

Rachel Palmieri
VA-SIG Chair

In this Issue:

VA Neurology Chief Named . . .	2
CMSC Meeting	3
Dates to Remember	4
Steering Committee	4

New Chief of Neurology

In our previous issue we said goodbye and thank you to John Booss as he retired from the position of chief of neurology for VA. In this issue we have the pleasure of introducing the new chief, Robert Ruff, MD, PhD.

Dr. Ruff received MD and PhD (membrane biophysics) degrees from the University of Washington. He was chief of the neurology at the Cleveland VAMC from 1984 to 2004 and chief of SCI and co-director of the Rehab Care Line at the Cleveland VAMC from 1998 to 2005.

In addition, Dr. Ruff is the medical director of the Cleveland

FES Center, and since September 2005 he has served as acting director of Rehabilitation Research and Development Service. He is a professor and vice chair of neurology and professor of neuroscience at Case Western Reserve University. He is board certified in neurology and spinal cord injury medicine.

Dr. Ruff's major clinical interests are neuro-oncology and neuromuscular and cerebrovascular diseases. His research interests include neuro-rehabilitation and skeletal muscle membrane physiology. Dr. Ruff has had continuous research



Robert Ruff, MD, PhD

funding since 1984 and has published more than 100 peer-reviewed publications, written more than 40 book chapters, and served as an editor on two textbooks. He has conducted studies on endocrine myopathy and surface membrane excitability and has designed experimental models for glycogen storage diseases and periodic paralysis.

The VA-SIG issues a big welcome to Dr. Ruff. We look forward to working closely with him in advancing the care of veterans with multiple sclerosis.

Changes in VERA Reimbursement Classification for MS Patients

The VERA '07 model will include two new basic care patient classes, bringing the total number of classes in the VERA Patient Classification hierarchy to 55. The new classes are for a diagnosis of multiple sclerosis.

Class number 18 is a basic vested class that includes patients that received either inpatient or outpatient care for a diagnosis of multiple sclerosis. This class is funded in Onco/Inf. Dis./Legally Blind Price Group (#4.)

Class number 21 on the patient class hierarchy is Multiple Sclerosis with Pharmaceuticals, funded in the Multiple Problem Price Group (#5.) This class identifies patients who have received inpatient or outpatient care for multiple sclerosis and are receiving specific high cost drugs documented in the VHA Pharmacy Benefits Management (PBM) database during the given year. The specific drugs include Interferon Beta-1a (Avonex, Rebif); Interferon Beta-1b (Betaseron); and Glatiramer (Copaxone).

For additional information, see the newest FAQs on the ARC Web site: http://vaww.arc.med.va.gov/references/faqs/faqs/faq_ll.html

For this Newsletter:

What would you like to see here?

Please SUBMIT:

- Forum topics
- Clinical questions
- Research topics
- Ongoing MS projects
- QI issues
- Outcome measurements
- Team initiatives
- Announcements

Please contact the VA-SIGnature editor at elizabeth.auld@med.va.gov (VA Connecticut Health Care System).

Thank you!



VA To Play Important Role in CMSC Annual Meeting

VA participation in the CMSC annual meeting continues to grow. Here are some of the highlights planned for this year's meeting in Scottsdale, AZ.

MEETINGS

June 1, 5–6 p.m.

VA-SIG annual business meeting

June 2, 4–6 p.m.

MSCOE–East/West directors and coordinators meeting

June 3, 3–4 p.m.

VA-SIG Roundtable

SYMPOSIA

June 2, 9 a.m.–noon

Unconventional Medicine and MS: Past, Present, and Future
Allen Bowling, MD, PhD, Chair
Topics:

The Past – A Historical Approach to Unconventional Medicine and MS
Jock Murray, MD

The Present – Current Dietary Supplement Use in People with MS
Allen Bowling, MD, PhD

The Present – Current Legal Issues Relevant to Unconventional Medicine, TBD

The Future – Research in CAM and MS
Vijayshree Yadav, MD

June 2, 9 a.m.–noon

Surviving Cognitive Impairment in MS: Interactive Case Presentations
Jeffrey Wilken, PhD, Cochair

Topics:

Areas of Cognition Affected by MS
Jeffrey Wilken, PhD

Review of Correlation between Neuro-Imaging and Cognition

Mary Elizabeth Quig, PhD

Review of Latest Pharmacological Treatment Options

Cynthia Sullivan, PhD

Identifying and Working with Cognitive Problems in the Neurologist's Office

Howard Rossman, DO, and Sonda Lawson, MA

Interactive Development of a Paradigm to Help MS Patients Survive Cognitive Problems

Jeffrey Wilken, PhD, and Mary Elizabeth Quig, PhD

June 3, 9 a.m.–noon

Progressive MS, sponsored by the MS Centers of Excellence and the VA-SIG
Chaired by Christopher Bever, Jr., MD, MBA; director, MSCOE–East

Topics:

Monitoring Disease with Neuro-Imaging: Correlates of Visual Dysfunction
Robert Shin, MD

Epidemiology: Cigarettes, Sun, Viruses, and Grandparents

Mitchell Wallin, MD, MPH

Symptomatic Management: Potassium Channel Blockers

Christopher Bever, Jr., MD, MBA

Immunosuppression: Low Dose Versus Immunoablation

James Bowen, MD

Neuroprotection: A New Therapeutic Approach for Progressive Disease?

Albert Lo, MD

The Chronic Disease Management Model in MS: Electronic Enhancements

Jodie Haselkorn, MD, MPH

CLINICAL COURSES

May 31, 2–4 p.m.

Tele-Medicine in MS Care: New Frontiers

Deborah Miller, PhD (chair)

Topics:

What Can Tele-Health Do to Enhance MS Care? Experiences from the VA

Jodie Haselkorn, MD, MPH

Mellen Center Care On-Line: A Health Services Experiment

Deborah Miller, PhD

MS Tele-Health: Where We Are and Where We Are Going?

Robert Kane, PhD, ABPP-Cn

Neuro-Ophthalmology

chaired by Robert Shin, MD (Baltimore)

Cognition Evaluation: How to Identify Problems and Make Use of Test Results

Jeffrey Wilken, PhD, Chair

WORKSHOPS

June 1, 1 p.m.–2:30 p.m. & 2:30 p.m.–4 p.m.

Differing Perspectives on MS Care: A Lively Case Based Panel Discussion (MSCOE and VA SIG)

Chaired by James Bowen, MD

June 3, 1 p.m.–2:30 p.m. & 2:30 p.m.–4 p.m.

Pulmonary Rehab in MS (MS CoE and VA SIG)

Jodie Haselkorn, MD, MPH, Chair

June 3, 1 p.m.–2:30 p.m.

Management of Pain in MS
chaired by Heidi Maloni, RN, MSN, CNRN, CRNP, MSCN

DATES TO REMEMBER

Monthly Clinical Care Teleconference

First Monday of every month, 12:30 ET

For more information, contact Peggy.Coffey@med.va.gov.

CMSC Annual Meeting

“Celebrating 20 Years of Excellence in MS Care and Research”

May 31–June 4

Scottsdale, Arizona

MSCOE–West Case Conference

Topic TBA

June Date TBD

Satellite Broadcast on Tysabri

June Date TBD

MSCOE–West Advisory Committee Meeting

August 3

Seattle, WA

John Whitaker Distinguished Lecture

“Neurology Advancements for the 21st Century: Clinical and Research Updates for 2006”

Featuring Kenneth P. Johnson, MD

September 15, 8 a.m.–4:30 p.m.

Marriott Waterfront Portland, OR

Topics include:

- Evaluation of Gait Abnormalities
- Small Fiber Polyneuropathies
- Hashimoto's Encephalitis
- Depression for the Neurologist
- Natalizumab and Other Monoclonal Antibodies for MS
- Neurocritical Care Update

Send questions to Jennifer.Jett@med.va.gov.

MSCOE West Regional Directors Meeting (VISNs 12–23)

Annual meeting of participating MS clinic directors and coordinators

Networking opportunities for clinical, research, and educational

September 16

Marriott Waterfront, Portland, OR

MSCOE–East Directors and Coordinators Meeting (VISNs 1–11)

Networking opportunities for clinical, research, and educational

September 17–19

Baltimore, MD

MS Education Opportunities

In collaboration with the MSCOE–West, the following courses are available through the VA Intranet.

Treatment Decisions in Secondary Progressive MS—http://vaww.sites.lrn.va.gov/vacatalog/cu_detail.asp?id=20796

Cognitive, Emotional & Psychosocial Issues in MS—http://vaww.sites.lrn.va.gov/vacatalog/cu_detail.asp?id=20598

Complementary and Alternative Medicine Therapy in MS—http://vaww.sites.lrn.va.gov/vacatalog/cu_detail.asp?id=20895

Uveitis and Multiple Sclerosis: A Case Conference—http://vaww.sites.lrn.va.gov/vacatalog/cu_detail.asp?id=20894

All the courses can be found by going directly to the EES Web site:

<http://vaww.sites.lrn.va.gov/vacatalog/default.asp>. Enter “multiple sclerosis” as a keyword. For more information contact anne.toothaker@va.gov.

VA-SIG STEERING COMMITTEE:

Rachel Palmieri, RN

rachel.palmieri@med.va.gov
Chair

Christine Martin, PhD

christine.martin@med.va.gov
Vice Chair

Peggy Coffey, MD

peggy.coffey@med.va.gov
Chair, Clinical Care Committee

Edward Daly, MD

edward.daly@med.va.gov
Chair, Membership Committee

Albert Lo, MD

albert.lo@med.va.gov
Chair, Research Committee

Lynne Walker, RN, CRRN

lynne.walker@med.va.gov
Chair, Education Committee

Elizabeth Auld, PA-C

elizabeth.auld@med.va.gov
Editor, VA-SIG*ature*